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RHODE ISLAND HAS SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN HISTORY OF U. S. NAVY DENTAL CORPS

Rhode Island always an exponent in the health services, played a significant and important role in the development and formation of the Dental Corps of the U. S. Navy. At the turn of the century seamen in the Navy received little or no treatment at the hands of qualified dentists. First mention of any organized dental treatment was made in the Surgeon General's report of 1903 in which he stated that hospital stewards who had training and experience in dentistry were providing dental care at the Naval Station in Newport, R. I. According to Dr. Howard Mathers, now residing in Newport, Horace Beck was the original hospital steward spoken of in the Surgeon General's report. This same Horace Beck in turn contracted the services of Dr. Howard Mathers with reimbursement from a hospital fund which all men in the service paid into as a sort of Naval "Blue Cross". The pay was meager and because of this Dr. Mathers was permitted to have a town practice as well as contracted practice at the Naval Station. Of interest, hospitals at that time were not always paid for out of government funds. The hospital fund, as explained previously, was used in 1907 to start construction on the hospitals at Newport, Chelsea, and Norfolk. Dr. Mathers, well aware of the need for an organized dental service, prevailed upon Dr. Henry Martin, another dentist, to use his influence with the U. S. Senator from Newport, George Peabody Wetmore, to introduce the necessary legislation in Congress. This he did and on August 22, 1912, the Dental Corps of the United

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States Navy was authorized by the 63rd Congress and signed into being by President Taft, the result of the early efforts of these dental pioneers in Rhode Island.

Among the four original successful candidates for commissions in the Dental Corps was Dr. Joseph A. Mahoney, commissioned in January, 1913, and whom many will remember as being on duty at the Naval Hospital in Newport during World War II.. Rhode Island was also honored on March 13, 1943, when the late Alexander Gordon Lyle who was then on duty at the Quonset Point Naval Air Station was selected to be the first dental officer to hold flag rank. The late Vice Admiral Lyle first distinguished himself by being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor in action with the Marines in World War I at Verdun. He also received from the Army the Silver Star Medal for heroism in the same campaign. His widow, the former Ruth Hare of Newport, still resides in that city.

From the original four appointees the Dental Corps continued to grow and reached its greatest peak during World War II when over 7,000 dental officers were on active duty with more than 11,000 dental technicians serving with them.

Today the Dental Corps of the U. S. Navy in R. I. is geared to care for the dental health of its forces ashore and afloat with the destroyer tenders attached to ComCruDesLant, the large clinic at the Naval Station, the Naval Hospital, Newport, the Construction Battalion Center at Davisville, the Naval Air Station at Quonset Point and the carriers USS Essex and USS Lake Champlain based there. Of note, the dental services rendered to the military by these activities have travelled a considerable portion of the globe in the past year. The Antarctic Support Activity and VX-6, has carried our dentistry to the South Pole. More recently, National Guard units activated this past year were given dental attention at Quonset Point prior to their deployment to Celle, Germany. This cooperation has been extended to all military elements

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on active duty based in Rhode Island.

Last year the Dental Clinic at the Naval Station at Newport hosted the Spring Meeting of the R. I. Dental Society and the meeting this year was held at the Quonset Point Naval Air Station. The latter activity is cooperating with the School of Dental Hygiene at the University of Rhode Island in an observership program as an aid to orientation in the various specialties of dental profession. Educational efforts by the Navy do not stop here. Each summer in recent years neophyte dental officers (juniors in dental school) are indoctrinated in special classes at the Officer Candidate School in Newport. They are given tours of the various types of activities located around Narragansett Bay in addition to military drills, a course in Naval justice and other prerequisites necessary to becoming a good naval officer. These young men come from all parts of the United States to learn not only of Navy life but also to know a bit about an area highly steeped in historical background.

The Dental Corps of the United States Navy is proud of its relationship with the people of Rhode Island and grateful for the part that they have played in its history and development.

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